

CAP'N PRATT

BY

MRS. TILLIE JOHNSON



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INTRODUCTORY

The first chapter of "Cap'n Pratt" was written for "Little Brothers of Mine" and the other chapters for the Junior Missionary Magazine. The author, Mrs. Tillie Johnson, has been long one of our most devoted missionaries at Miller's Ferry, Alabama, where at present she is in charge of the Infirmary and Nurses' Training School. Her husband, Rev. C. Johnson, is the Minister of our church at Miller's Ferry and also principal of the school.

Mrs. Johnson herself belongs to the colored race and no one is better fitted to give a true portrait of child life in the Black Belt of Alabama.

This little booklet is sent forth by the Women's Board in the hope that it may win many a friend for the poor little Cap'n Pratts, growing up in densest ignorance within the borders of our own country.

CHAPTER I.



CAP'N PRATT never did anything on land or sea to give him a right to the title Captain, for he is only a little colored boy in the Black Belt of Alabama. His father admired the big burly river captain whom he saw striding along the deck when he took his butter and eggs down to the steamer to sell. So when the tenth addition to the Smith family came, he was named Cap'n Pratt. Captain Pratt, indeed, is not the only member in the family bearing a title. There is Governor Moore Smith, and Lawyer Jones Smith, while the eldest brother is known as George Washington Smith.

Cap'n Pratt's home is a low one-room cabin in the middle of a cotton field, and often he and his three brothers who share his bed lie at night and watch the stars through the chinks and cracks till they fall asleep. A bed for father and mother with four year old Mattie at the foot, another for the five girls sleeping "heads and points," a rickety chair or so, an empty soap box for a seat, and a table complete the furniture, except for the skillet and baker under the table, for the cooking is done in the big fireplace which takes up nearly half of one end of the cabin.

I'm sure you would never guess where the provisions are kept. Every Saturday Cap'n Pratt's father goes to the plantation store and gets the weekly rations for the family, usually seven pounds of side meat and three pecks of meal. These are put away back under the bed—for safety, maybe. Never in all his life has this little black brother sat down at a table to eat his breakfast, supper or dinner. When the "tete" (food) is done his mother calls him and his brothers and sisters to the fireplace, breaks off a hunk of corn bread out of the skillet, and pours some molasses into tin buckets or lids or pans, one for each. The larger boys and girls stand, or sit on the edge of the bed, while the smaller ones sit on the floor or doorstep and sop their bread in the sorghum with much more relish than some boys and girls I know who feed upon the daintiest fare.

When Cap'n Pratt was a baby of only a few weeks old, a string with a dirty little bag, suspended from the middle and containing dried roots, a mole foot, etc., was tied around his neck. This was to keep off disease and help him cut teeth. Days and days were spent by Cap'n Pratt in the cotton field, where his mother would carry him, and, finding a shady spot, would leave him in care of the next youngest, while she and the rest of the family would go up and down the long rows with sacks tied across their backs into which they stuffed the fleecy cotton.



Watching for Pappy to come from the store.

On Sabbath morning this little boy puts on his clean clothes, (that is, if he has any, for it often happens that the mother is too tired to wash and patch on Saturday or his supply has given out,) and the clothes are sewed on him as they will not be taken off till next week. You see when he goes to bed at night he does not have to undress and is not bothered about dressing next morning.

One of the greatest trials of Cap'n Pratt's young life is the weekly hair combing which also falls on Sabbath. Had he been a girl it would not have been so bad, for his sisters and mother too have their hair divided into ten or twenty parts and wrapped with vari-colored strings, some white, some red, others blue, and the ends of these wraps tied together and held in place by a "head rag" or bandanna. When he was old enough to go to school his father took charge of this part of his toilet and cut all the hair off except a small patch on top. How relieved he felt! Hair combing days were over. But his teacher said the top must be combed daily and a straight part made as evidence. What did our boy do but get George Washington to cut the hair out in a straight line from front to back to look like a part!

Poor Cap'n Pratt's school life however was a brief one. It lasted only two months in the year and it was so long between the closing of one term and the opening of the

next that he forgot nearly all he had learned and each year had to begin at almost the same place. But even this school is closed now because they cannot get a teacher, and Mr. Smith is too poor to send his boy to the mission school fifteen miles away.

So poor little Cap'n Pratt, with thousands of others like him, having no means to learn even to read and write, is growing up in ignorance, not because he wants to, but because he cannot help it,—he has no chance. I feel so sorry for him, don't you?

"You must tote yo' own sins now boy, you gwine on 'leben yeah ole," said Cap'n Pratt's father to him shortly after he had passed his tenth birthday. "You bettah get deligion, 'cause you gwine to hell sho's yo bawn ef ye doan. I done toted all you ten chillun's devilment 'til I most broke down in my back. You's de las' one an' I is done wid you now, so you bettah git to prayin'."

You see Cap'n Pratt's father and nearly all the other boys' and girls' fathers in the Black Belt believe that they are responsible for their children's sins till they are ten years old and there is no need of them becoming Christians until they reach that age.

As "Big Meetin'" or "protrack" was going on every night in the church of which Cap'n Pratt's father was head deacon, Cap'n, with several others went to the mourners bench to "git deligion" as his father had advised. Crowds gathered around the mourners,

clapping their hands, patting their feet and swaying their bodies back and forth as they sang lustily:

"A is for Adam who was the first man,
D's for little Daniel in de lion's den,
J's for Jonah in de belly cf de whale
P is for Paul in de Phillipian jail.

Chorus:

They was a witness for my Lord.
An' you must be a witness for my Lord.
Sistah bettah min' how you walk on de cross
You right foot slip and you soul be lost.

Chorus:

An' you'll be a po' witness for my Lord
An' you won't be a witness for my Lord."

In the meantime one and another would lean over Cap'n Pratt and cry out, "Pray hard chile, de Devil is atter you sho, an' you got to see him an' cross over hell 'fore you git to Jesus," emphasizing each phrase with a decided pat on his back.

For several days Cap'n Pratt mourned, even venturing out in the woods by night and into the graveyard by day, trembling a little as he peered around occasionally lest "de Debil" should be in sight, yet pitifully pleading to see something that would be a sign of his acceptance. On the following Sabbath he went forward to join the church. The little log structure was packed to overflowing, visitors coming from

miles around, curious to hear the "travels" of the new converts.

"Cap'n Pratt", said the preacher, "tell de church yo' trabels in gittin' from hell's dark doah; what is you seen, what is you heerd, my chile, dat makes you knock at de chuch doah today?" Cap'n Pratt arose, faced the preacher, and in a weird chanting tone gave the following account of his "travels." "I's been a prayin' an' a prayin' 'cause I know ef I doan git deligion I gwine to de bad place. Last night I went out 'hind de tater house, an' I lay down flat on de groun;; an' while I wuz a layin' dere I saw a light an' a little white man a comin' to me. He cut me open an' took out my heart, and den he sewed me up agin, an' tole me my sins is forgiven', my soul sot free."

Cap'n Pratt sat down while murmurs of approval, amens and "I know dat chile's got it," were heard all over the house. "I move Cap'n Pratt be received into de chuch as a candidate for baptism," spoke up one of the deacons. After his baptism the convert is considered safe, and though he should lie, steal and even be sent to jail, his name still remains on the church book.

Whether the poor child in his longing for light, his imagination keyed up to the highest pitch by the intense excitement and emotion of the services, conjured up or dreamed his "travels," or whether the pitiful Father did send a ray from the Star of Bethlehem into his sinsick heart, I do not

pretend to say. I only know there are multitudes in this land of school houses and churches thus misguided as to their eternal destiny.

O, God, pity the poor Cap'n Pratts in the Black Belt.



Cap'n Pratt's home.

CHAPTER II.

Cap'n Pratt's First Thanksgiving.



BOUT the middle of November, George Washington put the Smith family all in a flutter of excitement by announcing that at the mission station there was going to be a "Thanksgivin' day" and that a free dinner would be served to all who went, ending up with, "Ise gwine an' Daddy said he borror Uncle Jake's mule an' Mammy an' all o' us could take de wagon. Won't dat be fine? Dey gwine to have some 'fresh' (pork) I know, an' I aint et no 'fresh' since las' Christmas."

"What is Thanksgivin' day?" asked Cap'n Pratt who had been listening with great interest to his brother, "Mammy, you gwine? Lemme go ef you go, I aint never been no where."

"Us wants to go too," chimed in the twins. "Aint none o' us gwine ef I kin see straight," answered the mother, "Pratt an' all the rest o' ye ain't shipped up to go no whah, 'cept 'tis Lawyer Jones an' George Washington an' dey ain't got no fittin' shirts. Ef yo' pappy could have a settlement, mebbe us could manage to git ready. I ain't never heerd o' no Thanksgivin' day before an' I'd like mighty well to go myself."

Just then the father walked into the cabin, looking very much like Santa Claus, with a huge cotton sack full of packages across his back.

"Ise had a settlement, Ca'line an' here's something fur you an' de chillins. I jes cleared twenty-five dollars dis yeah, so you mus' make out de bes' you kin. I finished payin' fur de mules," he added, "an' dat's purty good atter all, ain't it, ole 'oman?"

"Oh, Pappy," shouted Cap'n Pratt, "us kin go to de Thanksgivin' can't us?" as the mother and oldest daughters began undoing the purchases and exhibiting them to the delighted family.

There were gay colored bandannas, bright ribbons, two strings of beads for the twins, Dink and Soda, a bolt of blue cotton check, a red cap for Cap'n Pratt, who, although nearly eleven, was still called "Pappy's baby boy" and was a general favorite; besides there were cheese, a box of Uneeda biscuits, candy and some fat meat.

"Ef you an' de girls sew up right peart, Ca'line, I think us kin git fixed up all right fur de Thanksgivin'; I got dat bolt of check," said he as the paper was being torn off a large bundle, "So ez to give de boys all a shirt aroun' an' you an' de girls a dress apiece."

After sewing early and late with some assistance from an occasional visitor, the garments were at last completed as planned — except Cap'n Pratt's waist. When it was



"Us can go to de Thanksgivin', can't us!"

reached it was discovered that by some oversight the sleeves and collar were lacking. After much puzzling as to how the missing parts should be supplied, it was decided to make the sleeves and collar out of a remnant of yellow calico, left over from a quilt, pieced last winter, known as the "Evening Star," and the pride of the housekeeper especially. This was accordingly done, to the satisfaction of all, and to Cap'n Pratt in particular. As there was still some of the calico remaining, the mother love prompted the further decoration of

the twins' dresses with a fold around the skirt of each.

Bright and warm shone the sun that Thanksgiving morning and at an early hour the Smith family, each in his "Sunday best" was packed into the wagon, bound for the mission fifteen miles distant. Bandannas filled the place where hats were wanted, red or blue ribbon bows fluttered from the button hole of the three older brothers, Lawyer Jones, Governor Moore, and George Washington, while our little Cap'n Pratt, not to be outdone because he had no coat, wore his bow on his new cap. "Pappy" on Uncle Jake's mule rode on ahead of the wagon with the dignity of a brigadier general on dress parade.

Our party was joined now and then by others on horseback or in wagons, going to celebrate the first Thanksgiving these plantation people had ever known.

On their arrival at the mission, they found a large crowd already assembled in the chapel and the exercises about to begin. As the voices of the people on the rostrum, accompanied by the organ, rang out in a psalm of praise and thanksgiving, our visitors could scarcely remain in their seats, but half arose that they might get a better view of the singers and the instrument—itself an object of wonder.

The prayer of the mission pastor called forth many "amens" as he fervently thanked God that the people of the Black Belt, who

sat in darkness were seeing light, that their children could receive a Christian education, and the number who appreciated these blessings was so large.

Then came more songs of praise and exercises by the children, followed by expressions from fathers and mothers full of loving gratitude. "I so thank de good Lord," said a gray-haired mother, "dat us chillins kin git a edication, Ise too ole but Ise willin' to work my finger nails off in the cotton patch or any whah to keep my boys and girls in school."

After the services all were invited out into the grove where the home people saw that all visitors were served bountifully with pork, bread, cake and pies, out of trunks and goods boxes, though they themselves must live on bread and molasses for days after.

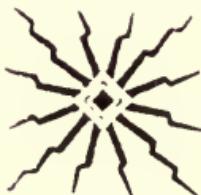
Then came games of various kinds, baseball, foot, sack and barrel races.

What a day it was to all and to none more than to Cap'n Pratt, to whom had come a vision of something better than he had ever known, a longing that expressed itself on the way back home that evening when every detail of the day's program was being discussed, "I wish us had a mission where us lives."

"Ise been studyin' chillun'," said their father when they reached home late that evening, "Ise been a studyin' all de way back home 'bout how I could git some o'

you in dat mission school. I wish I could sen' you all but I ain't able. So Ise 'cided dis; Ise gwine sen Cap'n Pratt in Gener-wary any way. May hap nex' year some o' de res kin git off. De teacher say part of de board kin be paid in taters and lasses an' sech likes. An' dere dat little red heifer calf, Cap'n Pratt, "what Mammy Susan give you, us kin take it along. Ise gwine to git Pappy's baby boy in school ef I has to mort-gage one o' de mules."

And so it happened that Cap'n Pratt's first Thanksgiving day became a real one. "Thanky, Jesus," he whispered as he knelt behind the "tater house" that night - sacred to the memory of his conversion, "thanky, Jesus, for I wants to learn, Jesus, I wants to learn so bad."



CHAPTER III.

Cap'n Pratt's Christmas.

KRISMUS gif', Pappy! Krismus gif', Mammy! Krismus gif', everybody!" 'Twas Cap'n Pratt's cheery voice calling out from his trundle bed early Christmas morning. "I catch you an' you—" But what else he said no one heard for the whole crowd of children, five in number including baby Tad, began shouting at the top of their voices: "Krismus gif'! Krismus gif'!" till the clamor was almost deafening. "Ef you don't stop dat racket, I'll gib you some Krismus you won't like," growled their father from his bed in the corner; "Git out o' here wid your fuss." "Pappy's" Christmas had begun the night before over a whiskey jug leaving him with a headache and a bad temper in consequence.

Their enthusiasm quite subdued for a time at least, the children crept quietly out of the cabin and joined their mother who had gone out a short while before and was seated on the crib door step.

George Washington, Lawyer Jones, and Governor Moore—the three older brothers—had gone off before daylight coon and rabbit hunting and would not be home before night.

“Mammy ain’t got much Krismus fur her chillen. I ‘lowed to gin you a apple apiece, but atter yo’ Pappy pay fur his jug he ain’t got no money lef’, I sent Lawyer Jones to de store wid six eggs an’ got you all a stick o’ candy apiece. Take dat now an’ run an’ play out in de road case yo’ Pappy ain’t feelin’ well.”

With a “thanky Mammy” from each one, Cap’n Pratt and the other five ran off sucking a stick of candy and were soon racing up and down the road kicking up dust and rolling over in the warm sand in high glee—much happier than many boys and girls I know who are loaded with toys and sweets.

Mammy and the older sisters busied themselves with breakfast; and as it was Christmas they were to have “flour bread” instead of the usual corn hoe cake. The art of cake making was wholly unknown in this family; but there must be sugar and eggs and flour they were sure. Two unbeatened eggs and one cup of sugar were added to the recipe for making biscuit, the whole made quite stiff and molded by hand into biscuit nearly the size of an ordinary base ball and which felt and looked almost as hard when baked in the big skillet on the fireplace. Two of these ball biscuit, “cake” or “sweet bread”

as they were variously called and a huge sweet potato roasted in the ashes constituted the Christmas breakfast and was munch-ed with great satisfaction by the family as they scattered about in different parts of the cabin or yard with both hands full.

By this time the male parent had gotten up and neighbors, women and men, by twos and threes came and soon the house was full of rather a noisy crowd which grew more noisy, talked loud, and laughed louder as the contents of the jug decreased. The slavery day idea that Christmas is not Christmas without whiskey still prevails, and many who are quite sober the rest of the year will drink very freely on this occasion.

"When I git big," confided Cap'n Pratt to the twins "I gwine to git us a jug, and us'll drink it all up an' have a big time like Pappy an' em, won't us, Dink and Soda?"

The twins would have clapped their hands at the proposition but they were full of partly demolished biscuit and potato, so they nodded their head in emphatic approval and grunted out their appreciation as their mouths were too full for words.

But Cap'n Pratt was destined to have changed views and a taste of real Christmas. It came about in this way:

"Uncle Ned," a distant relative of the family was visiting in the neighborhood and, always fond of Cap'n Pratt, asked that he

might take him home to spend a few days with him and his wife, "Aunt Sukey."

As Uncle Ned lived only a mile from the mission school where Cap'n Pratt had enjoyed his first Thanksgiving, their united pleas resulted in Cap'n Pratt's being perched behind Uncle Ned on his faithful old mule and trotting off in great glee.

"Dey gwine a hab a Krismus tree at de school house tonight, Cap'n Pratt," said Uncle Ned as they rode along, "an' me an' yo' Aunt Sukey gwine; want to go 'long too?"

"Oh, Uncle Ned, do take me, I'd be so glad. I been to de school house once; but I ain't never seed no Krismus tree. What's it like?"

"You jes wait an' see fur yo'se'f, Son. Its sech a purty sight I can't tell you about it."

Cap'n Pratt had on his suit he had worn to the Thanksgiving exercises and though it was a little faded, the bright yellow sleeves and collar, and red cap made him feel quite dressed up and holiday like. "I'll shine as well as any of the mission boys" he whispered to himself as he looked complacently at his outfit.

"Here, Sukey' come out an' see who I got here," called out Uncle Ned as they rode up to the gate of his cabin home.

Aunt Sukey came out as fast as her two hundred pounds would allow and seeing Cap'n Pratt, almost lifted him up in her arms. "La, child, I ain't seed none o' yo'

folks in nigh three year; an' how you is growed Cap'n Pratt, though you allus wuz a little splinter. How's yo' Mammy an' Pappy gittin' on?

Before he could answer these questions, Uncle Ned came in from feeding the mule saying, as it was late and they had to walk, they must start at once for the school house or they could not get a seat.

"Here's a snack I got ready fur you cause I thought you might be late; there's enough fur you an' Cap'n Pratt, too. Come right on an' you can eat it on de road. You know I can't walk fast."

"Look at the bright lights!" cried Cap'n Pratt, as they came in sight of the mission.

When with eager, expectant faces they looked through the wide open door, Cap'n Pratt almost held his breath with astonishment. What a sight to behold. A large cedar tree sparkling with tiny candles stood in the far end on the platform and from its branches were suspended toys, dolls, horns and—Cap'n Pratt could not begin to tell the pretty things, for he was scarcely seated before a chorus of happy faced children began to sing, "Merry, merry Christmas, everywhere." This was followed by speeches and more singing all about a Baby born in Bethlehem's manger, and angels and Christmas stars; and little Cap'n Pratt heard and understood for the first time that we celebrate Christmas, because God gave his only Son, the dearest gift ever

bestowed on man. Some one spoke of the way the day should be observed—in honoring our kind Father by deeds of love to others, giving joy to the aged, the sick, and the poor, and that it should never be spent in drinking and carousing as so many do. He had always thought of it as a time when Pappy and the other deacons and preachers along with their neighbors drank, going from house to house wherever a jug was known to be. Cap'n Pratt was thinking and somehow it seemed to him there was something wrong about the preachers and deacons.

"Look yonder, Cap'n Pratt," whispered Uncle Ned, nudging him in the side, "look comin' in at de do'. Dat's Santa Claus."

"Oh," Cap'n Pratt only made out to gasp. He could hardly believe his eyes; but when Santa Claus went up to the tree and began taking off the presents and calling the boys' and girls' names for whom they were intended he could remain on his seat no longer but stepped out into the aisle, watching every act with open-mouthed wonder.

But his astonishment and delight knew no bounds when one of the teachers put a bag of candy and a pretty scrap book in his arms, saying, "This is Cap'n Pratt, isn't it? (Perhaps she recognized him by his coat of many colors) You were here Thanksgiving, and you are coming to school in January. I will be your teacher, I guess, and I shall be glad to have you for one of

my scholars." She shook hands with Uncle Ned and Aunt Sukey, who also received presents and returned to help Santa Claus distribute the remaining gifts.

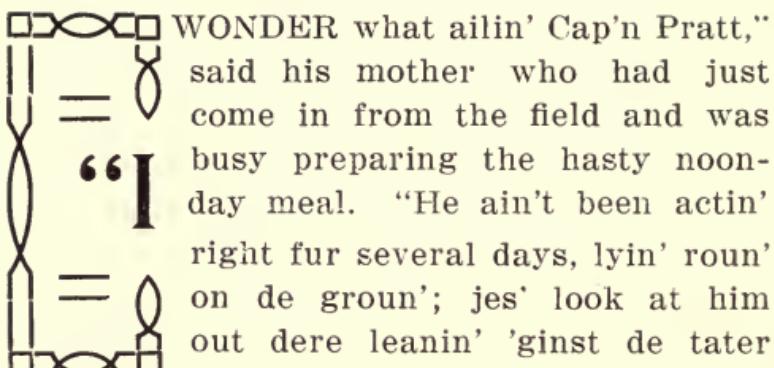
Cap'n Pratt's bright eyes were glistening with thankful, happy tears.

"Uncle Ned," he whispered, "ain't God good to give us all these nice things? 'an he gives us Jesus too—all for a Christmas present. I'm gwine to tell Pappy and Dink and Soda all about it when I git home, an' I ain't never, no never gwine to git a jug when I'm big."



CHAPTER IV.

Cap'n Pratt Sick A-bed.



“I WONDER what ailin’ Cap’n Pratt,” said his mother who had just come in from the field and was busy preparing the hasty noon-day meal. “He ain’t been actin’ right fur several days, lyin’ roun’ on de groun’; jes’ look at him out dere leanin’ ‘ginst de tater house mos’ ‘sleep.” Then raising her voice, “Cap’n Pratt, come here. What de matter wid you boy? You sick?”

“No’m, I ain’t sick, Mammy.”

“Don’t nothin’ hurt you?”

“Nothin’ but my head, but it don’t hurt much.”

Nevertheless next morning Cap’n Pratt did not get up with his other three brothers who shared his bed, but seemed even more sleepy and complained of his head being worse.

“Bettah send for Granny Harriet, ole man,” said the mother, “and let her doctah on dat chile. I nebber did know nothin’ to do fur sick folks. Ise skeered he gwine to have a spell o’ sickness, ef sumpin’ aint done. He won’t eat. I tried to git him to taste a roasted sweet tater an’ a little pot



Cap'n Pratt's head hurts.

liquor an' he wouldn't take a good mou'ful. You might go by an' tell her on your way to de swamp field."

In a comparatively short time Granny Harriet arrived.

"Dat chile wormy, C'aline; he so full o' em dey done gin (give) him de fever. Get me some collard leaves to go on his head an' stomach. I brung a handful o' catnip 'long an' I gwine to git some pine top, an' some yellow top, an' some snake root an' make him a tea. He'll git all right by de time you git in frum de field."

But that evening and several evenings

after when the family came in from work they found Granny Harriet's remedies had been of no avail. Though she had gone herself and got roots over which the wagons had run and scraped the bark of the dog wood backwards and made a strong infusion, Cap'n Pratt's hands were so hot as they lay in "Pappy's" that he went out rather abruptly one evening, saying he was going to town to get "some doctor medicine." In a few hours he was back and during the night faithfully administered the medicine sent by the doctor.

"Is I much sick, Pappy?" Cap'n Pratt questioned as he caught a glimpse of his father's anxious face. "Its most time fur de school to open an' I wants to go so bad," he added wistfully.

"Take yer medicine, Cap'n Pratt, an' you'll soon git well an' kin go to school," he answered.

If the first few doses from a physician do not have immediate effect, a common practice is to leave it off; and Cap'n Pratt's parents were no exception to the rule.

"Cap'n Pratt's porely dis mornin', C'aline, an' Ise half a mind to send George Washington over to 'Possum Bend an' git de root doctah what Granny Harriet said could sho' cure him. Us kin work de patch 'round de house here," he continued, "an' kind o' see how he gittin' 'long."

The conjurer or trick doctor arrived about noon, came in and looked at the sick boy

and declared he must have his dinner before he could work.

"I'll tell you what, Bud," addressing the head of the family, after completing his hearty meal, "I kin cure dat boy an' have him pickin' seventy-five or a hundred pounds of cotton in a few days for ten dollars. Gimme five now and tother five after I git everything in working order, you know," giving the family a meaning look out of his cunning reddish white eyes.

The landlord was sought, the cow and calf mortgaged for ten dollars, and the conjurer went to work.

He pounded herbs, he went into the woods and brought armfuls of various herbs and bark which he boiled in C'aline's big wash pot. He rubbed Cap'n Pratt with the decoction and gave him some to drink. Then he stood over the sick boy chanting words no one understood, waving his arms wildly and swaying his body to and fro. That night he called for a quart of whiskey as necessary to preserve the drugs.

"Well Bud, yo' little chap gwine a be up stanin' on his head fo' tomorrer," he declared next morning. "Give him de medicine I fixed like I tole you. I guess I'll have a cup or so o' coffee an' eat a snack fo' I go. Ise mighty busy dis summer, heap a sickness all over de country. De boy's a gittin' 'long fine now."

Cap'n Pratt was asleep when the conjurer left, he slept 'till noon and continued

to sleep though his father and mother tried again and again to arouse him and give him food and medicine. When later in the afternoon the now frightened family saw no signs of waking, the father galloped off at full speed for the doctor, eight miles distant.

The physician, familiar with the ways of the colored people in that section regarding their sick, soon understood the situation.

"You are late sending for me," he said, "that boy is very sick. It will not only take all my skill but the very best nursing to save him, and even that is exceedingly doubtful of effecting a cure. I tell you what you had better do, Smith," (after a moments thought,) take "that boy down to the mission hospital, where he can have constant attention. Now I tell you," as he saw they hesitated, "if you don't you might as well go order his coffin." After some further urging by the doctor and questions by the parents it was decided to take Cap'n Pratt to the hospital that very evening.

It was quite dark when "Pappy" carried his precious burden in and laid it on a snowy white cot in the boy's ward of the hospital.

"We will do our best for your boy and with God's blessing hope to have him well," responded a sweet-faced nurse to whom the father had expressed his anxiety.

Though she spoke hopefully, her experienced eye told her that the fight for life would indeed be a hard one.

The father returned home that night with a heavy heart. The doctor had spoken some plain words to him about trick doctors. Could it be true as he had said that the conjurer had made his boy worse? That he had given him something like poison, (he could not recall the big word the doctor used) to put him to sleep?

"Ef Cap'n Pratt only gits well," he vowed to himself as he drove homeward, "I'll never bother wid dem fellahs again. I allus said dey had sold deyself to de debil."

A few days after Cap'n Pratt's admission to the hospital a crowd of relatives from far and near, hearing of his illness, came to see him and were very indignant that they were not permitted to do so. "Us jes' wants to peep at de chile. Lawdy! dey gwine to let dat boy die and go to torment, an' us ain't 'lowed to sing and pray wid us own kin."

In spite of the excellent care given by the hospital, Cap'n Pratt continued very sick. At times it would seem as if all efforts were fruitless, and the little patient so weak and thin, lying there with eyes half closed, unconscious of everything, was slowly but surely drawing nearer to another country whose inhabitants never say: "I am sick."

It was nearly midnight. The nurse on night duty bending over Cap'n Pratt as he lay so still and motionless feared the little

spirit within the boy's slight frame would pass away before the morning light.

The mother is in the office, sobbing softly and waiting for some word. They have told her he is sinking. She cannot sit there but every few moments she tiptoes to the ward door and begs to be admitted. But the doctor has ordered perfect quiet.

"Poor little Cap'n Pratt, how I wish I could do something for you," murmured the nurse to herself as her fingers on his pulse told her it was very weak and rapid, "And the doctor ten miles away." she continued despairingly. "If I could only think of something else! What a poor servant to represent the Master! Surely he could have used a better nurse than I at least one wiser, abler—

A low knock at the front door interrupted her thoughts. Footsteps were heard in the hall and—oh, joy! it was the doctor.

"I'm so glad you've come," she said in a relieved tone as she hurried forward.

"I had a call near here and decided to come by and see the boy." Before he had finished the sentence he was at the sick boy's bedside, his hand on his pulse.

"A glass of water, as quick as possible," he ordered quietly. Rolling up the sleeve of the patient he injected a fluid into his arm; then sat down by his bedside to note the effect.

"Give him your best care tonight," he said at length as he rose to go, "His life

is hanging by a thread. This is the crisis; if we can keep him alive till morning he will get well. Here are written instructions to be followed during the next five hours. I'll be down in the morning."

It is morning. The waiting mother has just been told that there is hope and she has been allowed to go in and have a "peep" at her child as he sleeps so naturally. Tears of gratitude and happiness course down her black cheeks as she stoops over to get a good view of his face. His eyes open. "Mammy" he says faintly. His little weak arms are about her neck.

"Thanky Jesus, thanky Jesus; my chile gwine to git well. You done heard my pra'rs. He 'longs to you, Jesus." She had sunk down on her knees.

And the nurse as she watches the two feels her own heart throb with happiness, the blessedness of having ministered unto one of Christ's little ones. Lonely nights of patient watching, long, hot, nerve-trying days of fever fighting are forgotten in the joy of the scene before her, because it was done in His name.

And you, who pity your ignorant, superstitious, black brother, who provide these comforts, this home for the sick, the means with which to minister to such as Cap'n Pratt, God give you blessings and make your faces radiant with joy as the vision comes before you of "that day" when the King shall say, "I was sick and ye visited me."



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